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Hiram Jones' Bet

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By

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of Mrs. Barclay," etc.*

BOSTON

WALTER H. BAKER & CO.

1915

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Hiram Jones' Bet

CHARACTERS

HIRAM JONES.
MRS. MABELDA TRIPP.
MISS CLORINDA LANE.



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TMP92-008938

Hiram Jones' Bet

SCENE.—MRS. MATILDA TRIPP'S sitting-room, plainly furnished. Doors, R. and L. Small rug, R. C.; rocking-chair, L.; other chairs disposed.

MRS. T. (*sitting in rocking-chair, and is sewing*). I don't see why Hiram don't come. I hope Johnny didn't forget to tell him. I don't want to sleep in this house another night without having that lock fixed. And I hope Hiram won't charge me too much,—he ought to remember that I'm a poor widow, with nobody to look after me but myself. I'll make him set his price before he begins, for there's no telling how much he'll charge me if I don't.

HIRAM JONES (*knocking at door, R., then looking in*). Hello, Matildy! Johnny said you wished I'd stop in and do a little work for you.

MRS. T. Land, Hiram, I didn't see you coming! Come in, do, and don't stand there holding the door open. I ain't trying to heat all outdoors.

HIRAM (*entering*). Jehoshaphat, Matildy, 'tain't cold out to-day, and besides, I don't see as you've got much heat in here to warm up outdoors with. I see you ain't got your stove up yet. Is that what you wanted me to do?

MRS. T. No, it ain't, and I can heat this room all right from the kitchen so long's anybody doesn't stand holding the outside door open!

HIRAM. Oh, excuse me, Matildy!

(*Shuts the door carefully.*)

MRS. T. When I do want it put up, my next door neighbor will do it for nothing. What I want you to do is to fix the lock on my kitchen door. Something's the matter with it so it won't lock.

HIRAM. Why don't your next door neighbor fix it for nothing?

MRS. T. He's tried, and he can't.

HIRAM. Couldn't he put on a bolt for you?

MRS. T. What good would a bolt do when I want to lock it from the outside? You go out in the kitchen and look at it, Hiram, and see how much you're going to charge me before you begin. You want to remember I'm a poor widow.

HIRAM (*grinning*). Did you remind your next door neighbor that you're a poor widow? Let's see, he's a bachelor, ain't he?

MRS. T. (*with dignity*). You go along and look at that lock, Hiram, and don't try to be funny. And I can tell you one thing, my next door neighbor doesn't try to squeeze the last cent out of a poor forlorn widow.

HIRAM (*crossing the room; aside*). No, 'twouldn't do him no good if he did try. Takes a pretty strong man to get any cents out of *her*. [Exit, L.

MRS. T. I guess you can find the way all right. It's the outside kitchen door. I would go along and show you how it acts, but I'm in a hurry to get this waist finished, and I can't stop to talk. (*Looks around; raises her voice*.) Can you find it, Hiram?

HIRAM (*outside*). You bet!

MRS. T. I don't, neither, Hiram Jones. I ain't so fond of betting as you are. If I was your wife, I'd put a stop to *that*. I heard you lost fifty cents yesterday to Nate Harlow on some foolish bet or other. That true, Hiram? (*Pauses. He does not answer. She raises her voice*.) I said, is it true, Hiram?

HIRAM (*outside*). Hey? Did you speak to me, Matildy?

MRS. T. Yes, I did, and you'd have heard quick enough if it had been anything I didn't want you to hear. You needn't tell me that with you in the next room and the door open between —

HIRAM (*appearing in doorway, L.*). There, Matildy; there's nothing for you to get riled about. If you want that lock fixed, I guess 'twill cost you about a quarter.

MRS. T. Good land, Hiram, what do you want to charge so much for? It won't take you long to do it. I'll give you fifteen cents. Won't that be enough?

HIRAM. If you put ten cents with it, it will be.

MRS. T. I'll give you twenty cents, and you ought to be ashamed to ask any more than that. You ought to remember I'm a poor widow, and have to earn my own living.

HIRAM (*grinning*). Well, you want to remember I'm a

poor man, and have to earn my own living, and my wife's own living, and the own living of my own six children !

MRS. T. Well, good land, Hiram, you're better able to do it than I am —

HIRAM. Oh, I wasn't hinting to have *you* take care of my wife and six children !

MRS. T. You needn't try to be funny. If you didn't want a wife and six children you shouldn't have married them.

HIRAM. Jehoshaphat, Matildy, I didn't marry the children ! I always steer clear of widows, and I was warnin' your next door neighbor only this morning —

MRS. T. (*with dignity*). Hiram Jones, are you going to fix the lock on that door, or aren't you ?

HIRAM. You bet, if it's worth a quarter to you.

MRS. T. I do *not* bet ; I never do. Wouldn't you knock something off, if I was to give you your supper ?

HIRAM. Why, sure !

MRS. T. (*eagerly*). How much ?

HIRAM. One cent.

MRS. T. (*in a disgusted tone*). Hiram Jones, if you ain't the meanest man !

HIRAM (*cheerfully*). Never mind, so long as I ain't the meanest woman.

MRS. T. Think you're smart, don't you ? Well, hurry up and fix that door, and don't be any longer about it than you can help. (*He vanishes.*) I don't want the kitchen all chilled off, and I suppose you'll think you've got to keep the door open an hour or two. Wood's dreadful expensive, and I can't afford —

HIRAM (*looking in*). When's it going to be, Matildy ? Before cold weather, I suppose ?

MRS. T. What are you talking about ?

HIRAM. Why, your next door neighbor's got a big wood pile, and I thought you meant if you couldn't afford to buy wood —

MRS. T. (*snapping out*). I mean it'll *be* cold weather before you get that lock fixed !

HIRAM. Well, don't forget me when the invitations are out, that's all.

MRS. T. I shan't invite anybody —

HIRAM. Shan't you ? You'll get more wedding presents if you do. (*Disappears.*)

MRS. T. I do wish you'd stop being so silly, Hiram Jones,

and would hurry up and fix that lock. Next time I'll send for some one else to do it, I vum I will. Nate Harlow wouldn't spend all his time talking, and he wouldn't charge me so much, neither.

HIRAM (*looking in*). I guess you're going to have company, Matildy.

MRS. T. I hope not; I've got more'n I want now.

HIRAM (*soothingly*). There, there, Matildy, don't get riled. I won't charge you nothing extra for the conversation. I just see Clorindy Lane coming down the road, and I bet a cookie she's coming here.

MRS. T. Land, I hope not! I can't abide that old maid; always going around everywhere and trying to borrow something, and never returning it. Well, there's one thing about it, she won't get anything out of *me*!

HIRAM. Don't you be too sure of that! Clorindy Lane would borrow the ears off a stone post, if she once set out to do it.

MRS. T. (*firmly*). Well, she won't borrow anything from *me*.

HIRAM. Want to bet on it, Matildy?

MRS. T. Hiram Jones, I never bet!

HIRAM. Well, you ain't too old to learn, yet. See here. I'll bet you the quarter you're going to give me for fixing your lock that Clorindy Lane will go away from here with something of yours, and she won't steal it, neither.

MRS. T. What if I gave it to her?

HIRAM. No danger of that!

MRS. T. (*eagerly*). Do you really mean you'll fix that lock for nothing, Hiram, if I win the bet?

HIRAM. That's what I will.

MRS. T. (*hesitating*). I never made a bet before in my life, but if I could save my quarter—and I know I'll win, for I *won't* lend her anything, or let her steal it, either. I'll do it, Hiram; I vum I will!

HIRAM. I suppose you think it's all right because you're betting on a sure thing. Queer how some folks think betting is all proper if you win, but it's dreadful wicked if you lose.

(*Disappears, L.*)

MRS. T. I suppose I ought not to encourage Hiram, for he does bet altogether too much, but I'm only a poor widow, and

it's really helping the poor if he loses to me, and I do want that quarter. Hiram ought to be encouraged to be more charitable, anyhow. (*Knock, r.*) Come in!

Enter Miss Clorinda Lane.

CLO. How are you, Matilda? I felt rather lonesome this afternoon, and I thought presumably you did too, as you also live alone, so I decided to bring my embroidery and sit a while with you.

HIRAM (*looking in L.*). Wonder if she's interested in the next door neighbor, too? (*Vanishes.*)

MRS. T. Well, I keep so busy I don't have much time to be lonesome. I'm a poor widow, and have to sew for my living, and I can't afford to spend my time running around to the neighbors, the way some folks do. But sit down, Clorinda, won't you?

CLO. (*taking off her hat and shawl, sits down, and takes embroidery from her bag.*) If you're hitting at me, I believe in enjoying myself a little as I go along, and being sociable with folks, and not stay home and work every minute and scrimp and save so as to keep a penny a minute longer. I believe in sharing things —

MRS. T. Other folks' things, you mean?

CLO. Why not, if they have more than I? As I was saying to Mrs. Deering, whom I met out here —

MRS. T. (*quickly*). Mrs. Deering? Is she out here?

CLO. Yes; she was just going by as I turned in at the gate.

MRS. T. (*jumping up*). Why! I want to speak to her. Excuse me a minute, Clorinda. (*Exit hastily, r. Calls, outside.*) Mrs. Deering! Wait a minute!

CLO. (*looking after her*). I declare; I wonder what she's so anxious to see Mrs. Deering for? She doesn't hear her, — yes, she does. I'll ask her what's the matter when she comes back. Meanwhile I might as well make myself at home. (*Turns, and surveys room.*) Well, I declare, Matilda Tripp hasn't bought a new carpet yet! I told her when I was in here last spring she needed a new one. I'll wager she threw down that little rug so's to cover up the worst of the patches. (*Picks up rug.*) Yes, I thought so. And that rug isn't a very nice one, either. Just the size I need to put in front of the door in my sitting-room, but it isn't good enough, so I guess I won't borrow it. Mrs. White's got a better one, and

she's always willing to lend. This room looks just as mean and scrimpy as ever, don't it? I don't believe Matilda's bought anything new since I was here before.

HIRAM (*looking in L.*). Hello, Clorindy! Looking around to see what you can find that's worth borrowing?

CLO. (*starting, turns*). Why, Hiram Jones, how you startled me! I didn't know you were here.

HIRAM. I'm fixing a lock on the kitchen door. I ain't calling on Matildy for fun, so don't you go to starting that story.

CLO. (*sitting down*). Why, Hiram, what a thing to say! I never start stories about any one!

HIRAM. Well, perhaps not, but I noticed when you was calling on my wife the other day you had considerable to say about the neighbors.

CLO. Why, of course I occasionally repeat to my friends some things I have heard, in strict confidence, of course. I hope I never say anything that isn't true. And if people don't want to be talked about, they shouldn't do things that will make them talked about. Now, if you hadn't made that foolish bet with Nate Harlow yesterday —

HIRAM (*hastily*). Yes, I suppose so. By the way, Clorindy, have you succeeded in finding one of them newfangled egg beaters yet? You said you wanted to borrow one somewhere, so's to try it.

CLO. No, I haven't. Nobody I've asked has got one, and I'm real anxious to try one. The *Housewife's Helper* said they were so good. I don't know but I'll have to buy one myself, and that seems so wasteful, when I don't know whether I'll like it or not.

HIRAM. Well, I guess Matildy's got one. I see one on the table out here —

CLO. Oh, has she? Let me see if it's the kind I want!

[*Exit, L.*

HIRAM (*looking after her*). I thought that would start her up, and I'd like to see her borrow something of Matildy. I've got to earn that quarter somehow. I don't want to lose another bet so soon.

CLO. (*entering*). That's just what I want! How lucky you noticed it, Hiram. I'll get Matilda to lend it to me, and —

HIRAM. Do you think you will? Matildy ain't much on lending.

CLO. I know she isn't, but I must borrow that egg beater.

HIRAM. I bet she won't lend it to you. Want to take me up on it?

CLO. Why, Hiram Jones, I never bet!

HIRAM. Well, what of it? 'Twon't do you any harm, just this once. See here, now, I'll bet you a quarter Matildy won't lend you that egg beater, or anything else, either.

CLO. Why, Hiram, I think she will. Most folks are willing to oblige me, after I've talked to them a little while.

HIRAM. Well, I'll bet you a quarter Matildy won't. Come, now, a quarter would buy you an egg beater like that for your own.

CLO. (*hesitating*). I know it, but —

HIRAM. What are you afraid of? Afraid you'll lose?

CLO. No, I'm not! I wouldn't bet on anything I thought I'd lose on. I'm not so foolish as some folks are!

HIRAM. Well, if you're sure you'll win this, where's the harm? It's only a quarter, anyhow, and it's worth that to have a little fun. There, I hear Matildy coming back. Come, now, will you?

CLO. (*hesitating*). I think it's very foolish, and I never did such a thing before, but —

HIRAM. All right, it's a go! There she comes! Go in and win, Clorindy! (*Disappears*.)

MRS. T. (*entering R.*). Too bad to leave you alone, Clorinda, but I wanted to see Mrs. Deering about a dress she wanted made. I hope you haven't minded. (*Aside*.) I bet she's been prying around, to see if I've got anything new she can borrow. (*Sits down and takes up sewing*.)

CLO. Oh, no, I didn't mind. Hiram entertained me beautifully.

MRS. T. I suppose likely. He pretends he's fixing my lock, but it always takes Hiram Jones (*raising her voice*) four times as long to do anything as it does anybody else; he has to spend so much time talking.

HIRAM (*outside*). I can't hear a word you say, Matildy!

MRS. T. No, I suppose not, unless we were saying something we didn't want you to hear.

HIRAM (*outside*). Oh, I ain't listening! Go ahead with your secrets.

CLO. What a talker Hiram Jones is! I always get Nate Harlow if I want any work done. What's the news up this way, anyhow, Matilda? Got anything new lately?

MRS. T. No, I don't know as I have; not anything you'd

be interested in. (*Aside.*) If I tell her I've got one of them newfangled egg beaters, she'll want to borrow it, sure.

CLO. Nothing new for your house? If I had as much money as you have, and such a dear little home, I should want to try some of these new things that are coming out all the time. Have you a vacuum cleaner yet?

MRS. T. No, I haven't.

CLO. You ought to have one; they are just fine. Mrs. White bought a new one last week, the latest kind, and I borrowed it the next day to do my cleaning with. It works so well I told her I guessed I couldn't return it right away, not till I'd finished all my cleaning.

MRS. T. (*aside*). I should think Mrs. White would get tired of buying things for Clorinda to borrow.

CLO. What have you been doing lately, anyhow? Seems as if you must have something new since I was here before.

HIRAM (*looking in*). She has got one new thing, Clorindy.

MRS. T. (*aside*). Hush, Hiram!

HIRAM. But I don't know as she'll want to lend it, she thinks such a lot of it.

CLO. Why, what is it?

HIRAM. If you do succeed in borrowing it, you're smarter than I think you are.

CLO. Do tell me what it is!

HIRAM. It's a new next door neighbor!

MRS. T. Hiram Jones!

HIRAM. And he's a bachelor, and he's good-looking, and he's got a big wood pile, and I bet a quarter Matildy won't lend him to anybody!

MRS. T. Hiram Jones, are you going to fix that lock today, or aren't you?

HIRAM. There, there, Matildy, don't get impatient, it's most done already. (*Disappears.*)

CLO. I did hear some one had moved into the house next to yours lately. Do tell me about him, Matilda!

MRS. T. There ain't nothing to tell. Hiram Jones is nothing but a big tease. Say, Clorinda, have you seen them new —

(*Her scissors drop; she stoops to pick them up.*)

CLO. (*quickly*). Egg beaters? No, but I saw about them in the *Housewife's Helper*, and I want to try one. Have you got one?

MRS. T. Why, I—I—I didn't mean egg beaters; I meant —

CLO. Oh, won't you lend it to me? I'll be real careful of it.

MRS. T. I haven't had time to use it myself yet. I bought it only this morning, of a man who came around with things.

CLO. Well, never mind, I'll be careful of it, and I'll return it just as soon as I get through with it.

MRS. T. (*aside*). No telling when that will be! (*Aloud*.) No, I guess I can't lend it to you just now, Clorinda. I shall want to use it myself in the morning.

CLO. But I'll use it this afternoon, just as soon as I get home, and I'll send it right back to you. Do let me take it!

MRS. T. Sorry to disoblige you, Clorinda, but the fact is I've made a rule not to lend any of my things any more. It's too uncertain when I'll get them back.

CLO. Do you mean to insinuate, Matilda Tripp, that I *keep* the things I borrow?

MRS. T. No, I didn't say that, and you always do return things in the course of time, after you've had all the use you want out of them, but I'm not going to lend my things any more to anybody. If I buy a thing, I buy it for my own use, not for my neighbors'.

CLO. Yes, I've heard of folks who were too stingy ever to want to share anything with anybody.

MRS. T. You needn't do any hitting at me, Clorinda Lane! At least I *do* use my own things, and don't go around trying to borrow of all the neighbors.

CLO. That's all very well for you, for you've got money enough to buy what you want, but if you were poor and had hard work to get along like —

MRS. T. What are you talking about, Clorinda? I'm only a poor widow, and work for every cent I have.

CLO. Perhaps you call it working to walk down to the bank to draw out your interest, but I don't. It isn't because you're so poor you don't want to lend things, I know that. If 'twas me, I'd be ashamed to refuse the loan of a little thing like an egg beater, when I only wanted just to try it, but I guess Mrs. Deering was about right in what she said.

MRS. T. What did Mrs. Deering say?

CLO. Oh, I'm not repeating it. Hiram will be looking in and telling me it's gossip.

MRS. T. Never mind Hiram. I asked you, what did Mrs.

Deering say? (CLO. *puts her lips together and looks knowing.*) Clorinda Lane, you tell me what Mrs. Deering said.

CLO. I wouldn't be too anxious to know, if I was you. Folks wouldn't always like to know what was said about them.

MRS. T. Now see here, Clorinda, if you think you can sit here in my own house and insult me like that —

CLO. I haven't said a word, Matilda. And I'm not going to sit here any longer, either. (*Gathers up her work.*) I'm going over to see Mrs. Deering, to see if she's got one of them new egg beaters, and if she has, *she* won't refuse to oblige a poor neighbor, I know.

MRS. T. (*politely*). You needn't hurry, Clorinda. (*Aside.*) I suppose she'll go over there and tell her all manner of stuff about me.

CLO. I hadn't seen much of you lately, and I thought I'd be neighborly again, but I guess I've wasted my time. I hope I haven't borrowed too many of your precious minutes. I know you wouldn't lend me any if you could help it. By the way, do you happen to know if your next door neighbor has one of those new egg beaters?

MRS. T. Why, I—I —

CLO. Where did you buy yours?

MRS. T. Of a man who came around this morning.

CLO. Stopped next door, did he? Well, anyhow, it won't do any harm for me to stop and inquire.

(*Rises, begins to put on hat and shawl.*)

MRS. T. Why,—why, Clorinda, I shouldn't think you'd want to stop there.

HIRAM (*looking in*). Guess Matildy's getting anxious.

CLO. I'd like to know why not, Matilda Tripp. If one of my neighbors is too stingy to lend me what I want, I'd like to know why I haven't a right to try somewhere else. Well, I must be going. (*Turns toward door, r.*)

MRS. T. (*aside*). She'll go there and tell him I'm stingy. (*Aloud.*) Wait a minute, Clorinda. I—I don't think he's home.

CLO. It won't take long for me to find out. Of course, if I'd got one anywhere else, I shouldn't bother to stop there, but I'm not going home till I've done my best to get one of them egg beaters.

HIRAM (*looking in; aside*). Keep it up, Clorinda ; I guess you'll get it.

MRS. T. Well, I—I—I should think you'd be ashamed, Clorinda Lane, to try to borrow an egg beater of a perfect stranger!

CLO. I don't know why; it's only being neighborly, and I'd be willing to lend him anything I've got. I'll tell him so, too. Poor man, living all alone, there must be lots of things he'd like to borrow, especially as he can't be all settled yet, and my house isn't so very far the other side of his. It's time I began to be neighborly, and I don't know why I didn't think of it sooner.

MRS. T. You needn't trouble yourself, Clorinda. He can borrow all that's necessary from here.

CLO. From *here*? Why, Matilda, you said just a minute ago you'd made a rule not to lend anything to anybody; that you bought things for your own use, not for your neighbors'.

MRS. T. (*confused*). Well, I—I meant —— (*Hesitates.*) HIRAM (*looking in, chuckling; aside*). She's got you there, Matildy!

CLO. Nobody ever called *me* stingy, I'm thankful to say. I don't feel as if I'd got to hold on to everything so tight I can't ever oblige a poor neighbor. But then we aren't all made alike, I suppose. But I mustn't stand here talking, borrowing your time. (*Turns toward door, R.*)

MRS. T. Don't hurry, Clorinda! You—you aren't really going to stop in next door, are you?

CLO. Indeed I am! Why not?

MRS. T. (*aside*). I wouldn't care, only I know she'll tell him all manner of stuff about me, and he won't know but what it's true. (*Aloud.*) I—I've been thinking, Clorinda, and I guess, maybe, seeing it's you, I'll break over my rule this once, and let you take my egg beater.

HIRAM (*looking in, L.*). Clorindy's got the best of it!

MRS. T. (*turning toward door, L., seeing HIRAM*). Oh, you there yet, Hiram?

HIRAM. You bet! You don't think I'll go till I get my pay, do you?

MRS. T. (*aside*). Good land o' Goshen, I forgot all about that bet! Why, I can't let Hiram win! (*Turns back toward CLO., hesitates, looks back at HIRAM.*) And I don't want Clorinda to stop in next door. What'll I do?

HIRAM. Don't hesitate on my account, Matildy, if you want to lend your new egg beater. I know you ain't much on lending, but it does folks good to get a surprise once in a while.

MRS. T. Well,—you see I forgot about ——

CLO. If you don't want to lend it after all, Matilda, don't bother. I guess I can get one somewhere else.

MRS. T. No, you can't, neither. I'll let you take it, if you'll bring it back to-morrow. [Exit, i.e.

HIRAM. Did it, didn't you, Clorinda? Good for you! It takes a pretty smart woman to get anything out of her.

MRS. T. (*entering with egg beater*). Here 'tis, Clorinda, and I hope you'll be careful of it. I'll put it in this paper bag.

HIRAM. Your lock's fixed, Matildy, so if you'll pay me that fifty cents you owe me, I guess I'll walk along with Clorindy.

MRS. T. What's that, Hiram? 'Twasn't but a quarter. I made the bargain before you begun.

HIRAM. Oh, but you've lost your bet, so there's a quarter more.

MRS. T. (*looking startled*). Why, it is not!

HIRAM. You bet it is! You'd have made me pay up, if I'd lost.

CLO. If you are talking about bets, you can just settle with me, Hiram Jones. You lost your bet with me, if you please.

MRS. T. Why, Clorinda Lane, have you been betting, too?

CLO. I don't believe you'd better say anything about that, Matilda Tripp. I don't know what your bet was about, but I should judge you've lost, and I hope that'll show you the error of your ways. But I won, and I'd be obliged if you'd pay me, Hiram, and perhaps you'll know better than to do such a silly thing next time.

HIRAM. I—I—well, I haven't lost anything, anyhow, for I won from Matildy. Hand it over, Matildy, so I can pay my debts.

CLO. Yes, hurry up, Matilda, I'm in a hurry. I'll take the egg beater. (*Reaches for it*.)

MRS. T. (*putting it behind her back*). Wait a minute. Do you mean to say, Hiram Jones, that I've got to pay you a quarter and pay for fixing that lock besides?

HIRAM. You bet!

MRS. T. Well, I won't!

HIRAM. Very well, then, I won't take the law on you, but I'll tell the whole story all over town.

MRS. T. } (together). Oh, you mustn't, Hiram!

CLO. }

HIRAM (*grinning*). Mustn't I? All right, pay up, then.

MRS. T. I won't, neither ! Here, Clorinda, I'll *give* you the egg beater ! (*Holds it out.*) You needn't ever bring it back.

CLO. (*taking it*). Oh, thank you, Matilda ! You're much more generous than I expected.

HIRAM. Well, I vum !

CLO. (*turning toward him*). And now, Hiram, if you'll just pay me that quarter, I'll be going.

HIRAM. What ? I don't owe you no quarter.

CLO. Certainly you do. Didn't you say I wouldn't leave here with anything of Matilda's ? She lent it to me first, before she gave it to me, didn't she ?

HIRAM. Well, of all —

MRS. T. But I *did* give it to her, so you can't say she left the house with anything I'd lent her. So where's my quarter, Hiram ?

(*Holds out hand. She stands at his left.*)

CLO. Yes, Hiram, where's my quarter ?

(*Holds out hand. She is on his right.*)

HIRAM. Well, I vum ! You can't both have won !

CLO. Well, what I'd like to know is —

MRS. T. If we didn't win it —

ALL (*together*). Who did win that bet ?

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